THE PRISONER RELIEVED!

A SERMON,

PREACHED IN THE

MARSHALSEA COURT HOUSE,

By the Rev. THOMAS DENTON,

OCTOBER 22, 1775.

MATTHEW, Ch. xxv. V. 36.

"*I was in Priſon, and ye came unto me.*"

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"*I was in Priſon, and ye came unto me.*"

IT is a Truth, univerſally allowed, that no Argument is more conducive to the Honour of Chriſtianity, than the Excellency of the Precepts it every where inculcates. For, if we thoroughly exa-

mine the Writings of the Apoſtles, and the ſeveral Diſcourſes of Our Bleſſed Redeemer, it will be found that every Sentence is a Rule for our Direction through Life. And Our Saviour Himſelf was the brighteſt Example of the Doctrine he wiſhed to eſtabliſh. His Demeanor on Earth, at once exhibits to our View the fineſt Picture of Humanity and Beneficence. The tendereſt Sympathy for the Miſeries of Mankind was expreſſed in his every Action: the Poor, the Lame, the Deaf, the Blind, and the Unfortunate, were continual Objects of his Heavenly Compaſſion; nay, his coming upon Earth was ſolely to remove the Sufferings of his Creatures.

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Was it not for Man, corrupted Man! that he ſuffered Himſelf to be ſcorned, mocked and derided by the unbelieving Jews?—For what was his precious Blood ſhed upon the Croſs, but for our Salvation, and the Remiſſion of our Sins? Should we not then, in Imitation of ſo divine a Pattern, endeavour not only to inculcate, but to excel in the Practice of univerſal Love? And ſhould it not be our Study (as much as in our Power) to copy this great Original, who diffuſed around him ſuch Rays of Benignity, as even put the Incredulity of the Jews to a ſtand.

The Doctrine of Charity and Good-will to each other, he particularly en-

forces; "*A new Commandment I give* "*unto you, That ye love one another.*" And Saint John, emphatically ſtiled the Diſciple whom Jeſus loved, treading in the Steps, and preaching up the Doctrine of his Divine Maſter, gives this perſuaſive and affectionate Advice; "*Beloved, let* "*us love one another, for Love is of God,* "*and every one that loveth, is born of* "*God, and knoweth God.*" And as Charity and univerſal Love are thus, as it were, the Ground-Work of our Salvation, with what Sincerity and Attention ought we to practiſe ſo glorious a Work! To look out watchfully for Objects of Compaſſion, to relieve the Diſtreſſes of our Fellow-Creatures, (beſides the Conſciouſneſs

ſciouſneſs of having diſcharged our Duty) give ſuch inexpreſſible and heart-felt Pleaſure, as the Feelings of Humanity alone can experience.

'Tis CHARITY, BLESSED CHARITY! that is the grand Characteriſtic of our Holy Religion, and the diſtinguiſhing Mark of true, unfeigned Chriſtianity! For though Acts of Generoſity may (even amongſt unenlightened Nations) have been exerciſed upon particular Objects; yet, if examined into, they will be found to proceed from ſome ſudden Guſts of Paſſion, or from Motives merely ambitious. On the contrary, Chriſtian Charity originates from the nobleſt Cauſe!

It is the boaſted Virtue of the Heathen, adorned with that Meekneſs and Sweetneſs of Diſpoſition, that are ever Attendants on the Diſciples of JESUS.

The Charity of Jews, Mahometans, or Pagans, may, perhaps, relieve thoſe whom Chance has preſented to their View; but Chriſtian Charity is ever in Queſt of Objects for the Exerciſe of it's Bounty! The Cottage of the Lowly, the Retreats of the Unfortunate, and the Cells of Captivity, are equal Sharers of it's Liberality. How thankful ſhould we then be, that the Hand of the Almighty hath made Humanity the principal Ingredient in the Compoſition of

a Chriſtian! Some, indeed, attribute a charitable Diſpoſition to a Weakneſs of Underſtanding; if ſuch be the Caſe, I ſhould ever wiſh to be numbered among the Weak: But ſuch Kind of Reaſoning proceeds from an affected Singularity, and a Want of thoſe Feelings which ever ſympathize with Woe.

How happy am I, however, when I reflect, that Charity ſeems to have fixed her Reſidence in this Country. The generous, undiſguiſed Hearts of BRITONS are ever open to her Acceſs, and from thence ſhe pours forth Streams of Bounty on every Object around her. The Number of Public Charities about this

this Metropolis bear ſufficient Teſtimony to the Truth of my Aſſertion. Look but around, and you will find the lenient Aid of Charity extended to the Infane, the Sick, and the Unfortunate. The helpleſs Orphan reſcued from Deſtruction, and reared by the foſtering Hand of Humanity, pours forth Bleſſings on the Generoſity of thoſe who fed it. Such Charities as theſe have, for a long Time paſt, met with Encouragement, Countenance, and Protection, from People in Power; a Matter which at once does Credit to their Wiſdom as Politicians, and to their Feelings as Men. For to chear the Drooping, to comfort the Sorrowful, to ſuccour the Needy,

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and provide for the Unfortunate, ſhould ever be Objects of Attention with a diſcerning Public, and a wiſe Legiſlature. It is this Spirit that renders our Navies and Armies truly formidable; for it preſents to the Soldier and the Sailor the pleaſing Proſpect of retreating with Competence and Comfort; a ſure Reward to thoſe who have ſuffered in the Service of their Country.

And though the Vices of the Age, and the accumulated Evils that always attend a great, a wealthy, and a commercial State, are much too frequent; and though Deviations from the Paths of Honour, of Virtue, and every moral

Principle may ſometimes occur; yet the greateſt Enemies to our Country will allow, that the Spirit of Benevolence is truly the Characteriſtic of this Nation. The Hearts of BRITONS are as tender to feel as they are willing to relieve, and are ever ready to ſuccour Diſtreſs and apply the lenient Aid of Mercy to Sorrow and Affliction. It is this that is the moſt convincing Proof of the Purity of our Religion, which diffuſes a Spirit of Humanity and Fellow-feeling wherever it is ſpread, and makes the human Heart more civilized and compaſſionate.

Having thus ſpoke of Charity, and Charitable Inſtitutions in general, give

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me Leave to ſay ſomething more particularly applicable on the preſent Occaſion.

The Caſe I am about to ſpeak of, and the Relief I would wiſh to recommend is, that of thoſe who are unhappily confined in this Place for Debt.

There is ſurely no Situation in Life more calamitous, or more to be pitied, than that of an unfortunate Wretch under ſuch Circumſtances. His Friends tired with his importunate Requeſts for Relief, abandon him to his Fate with bitter Cenſures on his Indiſcretions and paſt Follies. His Enemies, knowing

themſelves ſecure from his Reſentments, load him with all the bitter Invectives, that wanton Pride, or helliſh Malice can inſpire; not reflecting how emphatically the Saviour of the World ſpeaks of Charity to the Priſoner in the Words of the Text.

"*I was in Priſon, and ye came unto me.*"

How pathetic a Sentence! And how worthy the Divine Lips that ſpoke it!

Let us, however, take a View of the Debtor, from the Commencement to the Conſummation of his Misfortunes. You will frequently find a Man unblaſted in his

his Character, unſullied in his Honour and Integrity, his Family flouriſhing, and bleſt with Happineſs and Proſperity; I ſay, you may even find a Man in ſuch a Situation, ruined in a Moment, by the pretended Friendſhip of an artful Villain, or the dark Suggeſtions of an envious Neighbour. Loſſes, ſudden and conſiderable, and Diſappointments in pecuniary Engagements, may have retarded his Payments beyond the uſual Time, which, perhaps, brings on an immediate Arreſt, and the unhappy Wretch is torn from his beloved Wife and helpleſs Family,—from his Friends and from his Home—and unable to ſatisfy the accumulated Demands that then pour in

upon

upon him, he is doom'd to the Miſeries of Captivity; and the *widow'd* Partner of his Bed, and Infant Children, involved in Penury and Want. Thus is Himſelf and Family ruined, and deſtitute of the Comforts, nay, of the Conveniencies of Life, he is left to drag on an old Age of Miſery in Anguiſh and Confinement. In ſuch a Situation, what Reflections muſt aſſail him!—Even the free Air of Heaven, ordain'd by the Almighty to breathe alike on all his Creatures, is denied him!—Deprived of the very Neceſſaries of Life, plung'd deep in every Sorrow, reflecting on the dreadful Situation of his ruined Family! His liſping Babes hanging round his tottering Knees, in

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vain ſuing for that Bread which *He* cannot give! The rude Blaſts blowing over his uncover'd Head, and expoſed to the Inclemencies of the Seaſons: What muſt be his Feelings!

Ye Men of Humanity and Tenderneſs!—Would ye but for a Moment conſider His Situation, your Hearts muſt bleed with Anguiſh. Ye who are bleſt with every Comfort, Elegance and Luxury of Life, whom preſſing Penury hath never yet aſſail'd! It is your's to viſit the Diſconſolate, the Fatherleſs, and the Man oppreſs'd with every Hardſhip that Humanity can ſuſtain. Hunger, Grief and Captivity at once attack him, and

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with more than ferocious Eagerneſs ruſh upon his Heart, which, unable to ſuſtain the Conflict, muſt, without timely Aſſiſtance, give Way to the Shock. — Be it your's to exert yourſelves as Men and as Chriſtians, and to uſe every Effort that Humanity can ſuggeſt to beſtow Peace, Relief and Comfort on the Unhappy. Ye affluent and ye happy, let me again beg of you to think but of the complicated Sufferings that the Priſoner and his helpleſs Family daily, nay hourly, experience. —— Separation from domeſtic Society and it's Comforts, unavoidable Neglect of a deſerted Offspring; Anguiſh of Mind, Diſappointment in Temporal Views, Prejudice of Morals, and Infamy

in the World's too general Eſteem, are but ſome of the moſt obvious Misfortunes attendant on Confinement.

Viſit but the Priſon for a Moment, and there you will ſee a wretched, though honeſt Man, with ſix or ſeven little Dependants on him for Bread, render'd utterly deſtitute, and Himſelf languiſhing under the hourly Horrors of a Priſon: What can the miſerable Object do in a Situation like this? How can the poor Woman, his *widow'd* Wife, obtain a neceſſary Proviſion for her *Fatherleſs* and half-famiſhed Offspring? Or, what moral Care or Attention can they, Pitiable Infants! enjoy amidſt the Soul-

harrowing Diſtraction of maternal Anguiſh!

'Tis your's to change the Scene! and by the foſtering Hand of Charity, to raiſe their drooping Heads; to cheriſh their ſtarving Infants, the innocent Companions of their Misfortunes; to cloath the Naked; and allay the Anguiſh of Thirſt and Pains of Hunger. *A Deed like this* would do Credit to your Humanity and Feelings, and gratify every Noble Paſſion of the Soul! It would be acting up to the Example of the bleſſed Jeſus, whoſe Life upon Earth was one continued Act of Charity and good Will to Men. It would procure you the

Bleſſings

Bleſſings of the Poor upon Earth, and a Happineſs hereafter Ten Times more valuable than the Poſſeſſion of Millions can confer.

And that you may be ſhielded in the Day of Danger, ſheltered from Affliction, and enjoy a continued Series of Happineſs and Liberty, *May God of his Infinite Mercy Grant, through the Merits and Mediation of* JESUS CHRIST.

FINIS.

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